
Tuskegee International Conference on the Negro

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NOTES AND REVIEWS

TUSKEGEE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE NEGRO

Perhaps the most interesting thing about the International Conference on the Negro, held at Tuskegee Institute, Tuskegee, Alabama, April 17, 18, and 19, was the fact that it brought together for the first time representatives of the Negro race from every part of the world in which Negroes constitute any large portion of the population—from Africa, the United States, the West Indies, and South America. The effect of this first meeting of the different branches of the race will vary with the different countries, according to the conditions that prevail there. In the West Indies there seems just now to be a demand for some form of industrial education for the masses of the people, who are being driven abroad to find labor while their places on the plantations, in Jamaica at least, are being taken by coolies, imported from India. As Jamaica was represented by its director of education and some half a dozen other persons connected directly or indirectly with education, it seems likely that this Conference will have its largest influence upon social conditions in the West Indies, through the schools.

In West Africa the announcement of the Conference seems to have given a new impetus to the sentiment in favor of an African nationality, which is stirring in the back of the black man's head, in that part of the world. This is indicated by the numerous letters that were received from the leading natives. One of these was from Mr. Casely Hayford, a native barrister-at-law, at Sekondi, on the Gold Coast, the author of *Ethiopia Unbound*, perhaps the first book written by a native to give expression to the sentiment of African nationality. Mr. Hayford says:

There is an African nationality, and when the aborigines of the Gold Coast and other parts of West Africa have joined forces with our brethren in America in arriving at a national aim, purpose and aspiration, then indeed will it be possible for our brethren over the sea to bring home metaphorically to their nation and people a great spoil.

You have a great influence for good, under God, and I venture to hope that some of the thoughts which are moving West Africa as one body will appeal through you and other leaders of our race to our people on the other side of the Atlantic.

Another interesting letter was from representatives of the Ethiopian Church at Klipspruit, Transvaal.

The Tuskegee Conference was not primarily a race meeting. It was a meeting of all those who were interested directly or indirectly in the practical work that is being done to educate and uplift the Negro, either in Africa or America. Eighteen foreign countries, or colonies of foreign countries, and twenty-five different missionary societies, representing twelve different religious denominations were represented in some way, officially or unofficially at the Conference.

The discussions for the three days were divided as follows: the first day, "Conditions;" the second, "Missions," the third, "Methods." Under these three heads it was planned to give the members of the Conference first of all a general notion of the social situation in the different countries represented; some notion of the problems of the missionary organizations, in their relations not only with the native peoples but also with the governments of the different countries and colonies in which these missions are located; finally to discuss in a general way the manner in which education can be applied to the solution of the problem which the conditions have produced.

It is not possible to more than indicate the character of the papers which were presented. Dr. Patton, home secretary of the American Board of Foreign Missions, said there were sixteen railway lines on the west coast of Africa, starting for the rich countries of the interior. Several of these are to be trunk lines, either crossing the Continent or penetrating the lake regions. "Now for a Conference like this," said Dr. Patton, "the chief significance of its commercial development lies in the fact that our whole civilization with its wonderful content has descended upon Africa in a cataclysmic wave. These pagan tribes, which have been living in their simple and undeveloped state from time immemorial, are now called upon to adjust themselves to the Western way or be blotted out."

Central Africa, according to Dr. Patton, is now a battle ground of two civilizations—the civilization of Christendom, and the civilization of Islam. The missionaries of Mohammed and the missionaries of Christ are the advance guards respectively of the

two contending religions. Dr. Patton thinks it is of tremendous importance that Christianity should be victorious in this battle. There were, however, other points of view represented at the Conference. There is a school of thought in England which believes that the religion of Mohammed is best adapted to Africa. This view was tacitly expressed in a paper by E. D. Morel.

On the second day there was a discussion of the question that has arisen in some parts of French Africa, as to the right of the missionaries to teach the natives in their own language. France is trying to make Frenchmen of the people in the French colonies, because she expects to use some of them for soldiers. It is consequently important that they should learn the French language.

Another interesting paper was that of Maurice S. Evans, representative of the African Society, of London, England, who pointed out that if the natives should attempt in any large numbers to compete with the white man in the skilled trades, this would probably lead to conflict. The dilemma in which South Africa finds itself is this: that it can't allow the natives to remain uneducated and uncivilized because they are so numerous that they would constantly menace the lives of the white people; on the other hand it seems inexpedient to civilize and train them to be skilled workmen because this would be resented by the white population.

A considerable portion of the time devoted to Missions was given up to hearing of the work and hopes of the colored missionary societies from the United States. All of the Negro churches in the South are now sending missionaries to Africa, but these missionaries are not welcomed by the resident white people who are in control of the country, and this has become a grievous complaint among the colored missionaries in the United States.

Another subject for discussion was the necessity for a union of effort among the colored missionary societies of the different denominations. At a meeting held on the last day of the Conference the whole subject was frankly discussed by the colored and white missionaries. As a result it was decided to invite Dr. Booker T. Washington to go to South Africa to meet the members of the South African Union, and seek to find some working basis by which the colored missionaries of America can have their part in the redemption of the dark continent.

The paper of chief interest on the third day's meeting was that of Prof. W. I. Thomas, professor of sociology at the University of Chicago, Illinois. The subject was "Education and Racial

Traits." Professor Thomas reviewed the old question of the fitness of the Negro as a race to acquire the culture of the white man, and participate in the white man's civilization. His thesis was that culture and civilization generally were not inherited. Each generation has had to acquire it for itself. The fact that a race had not reached a high stage of civilization did not therefore prove that it could not do so, provided it succeeded in getting into the environment which was adapted for civilized life and provided also that it had some way of tapping the vast stores of knowledge accumulated by previous generations. The method by which each individual taps this vast store of accumulated knowledge and culture is education and all the evidence points to the fact that any race which has an opportunity for education can put itself into possession of this culture and share in this civilization.

The most important declaration adopted by the Conference provided for similar gatherings in the future: it read—

Impressed with the value of the opportunities for discussion and observation that this meeting has afforded, the Conference recommends that similar international meetings be held triennially; arrangements for the place of meeting and the preparation of a detailed program to be placed in the hands of a committee to be appointed at this conference. The Conference also recommends that efforts be made to appoint local committees or representatives for the collection of information along lines to be suggested by this central committee.

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